



**Testimony  
Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
United States House of Representatives**

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**Weapons of Mass Destruction: Is  
Our Nation's Medical Community  
Ready?**

*Statement of*

**Jerome M. Hauer, M.H.S.**

*Acting Assistant Secretary for Public Health*

*Emergency Preparedness*

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*



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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to be here

today to comment on the Department of Veterans' Affairs program to develop medical education and training for consequences of terrorist activities.

My name is Jerome Hauer. I am the Acting Assistant Secretary for Public Health Emergency Preparedness within the Department of Health and Human Services. The Office that I lead is responsible for coordinating and directing the emergency preparedness and response efforts of the HHS agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in the case of a public health emergency. My office also works closely with CDC and HRSA to ensure the effective implementation of the state and local public health and hospital preparedness cooperative agreement programs and HRSA's new continuing education/training and curriculum development program for bioterrorism and other public health emergencies.

As you can see, aspects of the mission of the Department of Health and Human Services are closely aligned with the VA's healthcare mission. As a result of this and as a result of deliberate efforts by members of both Departments to maintain open lines of communication, HHS continues to benefit significantly from a strong working relationship with VA. One example of our collaboration is VA's support of HHS's Emergency Support Function 8 activities during disasters, through the contribution of both human and material resources. VA's assistance has also been invaluable to the

creation and ongoing maintenance of the Strategic National Stockpile.

Our two Departments have continued to build a relationship through a variety of other initiatives as well. On a monthly basis, we meet together for the Federal Partners Meeting which includes high level representation from VA, the Department of Defense, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Our goal is to ensure continued coordination, throughout the Federal government, of health-focused terrorism preparedness initiatives throughout the federal government. We also participate with VA and other Federal agencies in joint activities such as Liberty Shield, a Department of Homeland Security initiative that has increased our preparedness for terrorism during the conflict in Iraq. HHS and VA continue to coordinate the monitoring of human health in the U.S. as part of this effort.

VA should be recognized for its long-standing commitment to the provision of expert hospital and outpatient care for veterans. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the role of VA as a critical resource for the education of our nation's health care professionals. It is in this capacity that I see a great deal of potential in terms of ensuring that our physicians, nurses, paramedics and other health providers are prepared to meet the challenges of caring for victims of a biological or chemical attack.

HHS has been working vigorously with health professional schools and associations to develop appropriate training materials and curriculum objectives for the treatment of victims of chemical and biological agents. The CDC and HRSA cooperative agreement programs have portions that focus on education and training for public health and hospital-based providers, and HRSA will competitively award \$28

million in FY2003 to academic health centers and other health professions training entities for bioterrorism preparedness education and training. As HHS works to establish these programs, it is essential to identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination with other partners. VA maintains a concentration of expertise in the treatment of biological and chemical agent casualties and is therefore a considerable resource for supporting specialized education in this field. Furthermore, as training sites for the majority of health professions schools, VA facilities play a prominent role in the earliest stages of medical training. Building on our existing relationship, HHS and VA can work together to further the integration of high-quality terrorism preparedness training into the education of our nation's health care providers.

VA's contributions to terrorism preparedness do not end with the establishment of robust training and education programs. It is also important to recognize that in the case of a biological or chemical terrorism attack, or other sizable emergency, VA has served, and will continue to serve as a *community* resource, for both veterans and, when necessary for non-veterans. As I alluded to earlier, HHS views VA resources broadly during an emergency, and VA has reliably responded to our requests for assistance. HHS's continued partnership with VA will benefit our states and communities by strengthening the skills of our front line health care providers and by expanding the depth of resources that can be called upon to respond to an emergency.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.